

THE RHODESIAN JOURNAL

of

ECONOMICS

The Quarterly Journal of the Rhodesian Economics Society

Editorial Board:

A. M. Hawkins (Editor), M. S. Brooks, M. L. Rule and P. Staub.

ARTICLES

page

<i>Rhodesia: Sanctions, Economics and Politics</i>	P. B. Harris	5
<i>Aspects of the Cabora Bassa Scheme</i>	J. C. Graylin	21
<i>Economic Growth and Community Development</i>	R. G. Howman	25
<i>Wage Structures in Rhodesia</i>	J. A. Scholtz	38
<i>The Rhodesia Freedom From Hunger Campaign</i>	John Lombard	44

Review Article

<i>Evolution of a Money Market</i>	Sir Henry McDowell	52
<i>Economic Diary</i>		58

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**Economic Growth and Community
Development**

R. G. Howman

Mr. Howman is Deputy Secretary in the
Ministry of Internal Affairs.

ECONOMIC GROWTH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT¹

R. G. HOWMAN

Economic growth in Tribal Trust Areas is the problem facing us and the question is how are we to understand it, grasp its nature?

Any one of us may take a walk through a tribal area and see a tumult of rocks and boulders, a mass of shrubs and grasses, or a collection of individuals engaged each on his or her little affairs. We could also give a report on what we saw, maybe even theorise on the evidence of our eyes and suggest improvements. How valid are such observations, yet they form the basis for most of the views and arguments!

A geologist, armed with his science, would find "laws and common properties" amidst the chaos of rocks and soils; the botanist would do the same amidst the chaos of vegetation.

What then are we to do about the human phenomena we see in the tribal areas? How put some meaning, some system, some interpretation into the chaos of human actions? Just as some people haphazardly collect wild flowers, so some have collected "customs", and could go on collecting customs all their lives, so rich and varied are they. Obviously such collections are extremely interesting, and lend themselves to systematic cataloguing analysis and description, but how useful are they! Had Newton confined himself to noting that apples fell, or the number that fell per hour under varying conditions of temperature or sunlight, we would never have had a theory of gravity.

Mere collection is not enough. We must have sound theory if we are to plan with understanding, if practical action is to be really practical and purposeful. Yet what have we got to work with in the human and social field? Precious little. I suppose Economics is the most advanced. Certainly its status is such that economists are in demand for most planning bodies or commissions of enquiry, but since economists were required to extend their operations into the underdeveloped portions of the world—what we call the subsistence sector of Rhodesia—there emerged a basic questioning of, indeed disillusionment with, economic theory.

A New Approach.

For instance, Professor Sadie in his report says, "A positive reaction to economic stimuli . . . cannot be taken for granted as in the case of the

¹ Paper read to the Society in June 1968.

developed community . . . this is the crux of the matter . . . investment in the African areas, without a considerable amount of supporting action (Note, he does not say what), will be wasted".² Later on he refers to, "lowering the socio-psychological barrier to economic development", to destroying "those social values which inhibit economic growth". He makes the point that developments should be in the hands of an officer with wide experience of a generalist nature, including study in economics, social anthropology and psychology.

You will appreciate what a great advance this represents in the understanding of subsistence economics if you compare it with economic reports of only 8/9 years ago—

"the task of development must hinge around specialists, not administrators who have attained seniority by virtue of 'knowing the African' ".
 "if labour productivity is to increase then there has to be a spread of techniques and this requires a better utilization of existing extension services and an increase in those services."

This kind of economic theory influenced a Parliamentary Select Committee in 1960 to recommend, after listing the "four main factors affecting agricultural output as land, labour, management and capital", that a team of world-recognised agricultural experts be invited to draw up a development plan (the Philips Commission) and that a Development Board be created as "the task of development hinges around specialists, not administrators".

As your Chairman has mentioned, I recently gave a talk on this same subject to the Local Government Association. I do not intend to cover the same ground but may I recall one statement:—

"I hope the picture shows that things are much more complicated than development planners realise, and that the real problems of economic growth are not economic at all, so they are beyond the competence of the economists, financiers and technologists who are usually consulted."

Obviously economists, financiers and technologists are essential contributors to the problem, but into whose competence does this zone beyond their competence fall? I suppose the answer is that of the sociologist or psychologist but what contribution have they made to practical planning? Bits and pieces yes, but is there anything to match an economist like Arthur Lewis! We certainly need some new kind of combined research!

In our tribal areas we have some 2½ million persons. The question to consider is how should we think about them?

For some 40 years we have thought about them as a mass of individuals who have increased from 563,000 in 1928 to over 2½ million. All our planning

2 J. L. Sadie. "Planning for the Economic Development of Rhodesia", 1967.

was based on an approach to individuals—how to change the isolated, independent cultivator on his patch of land: how to persuade or force him to increase his productivity.

In the first 20 years we tried to change him by demonstration and persuasion. When this was found to be a failure, policy shifted to one of “compulsory planned production under discipline to ensure progress”, and for some 15 years one of the boldest and most determined efforts to “revolutionise African Agriculture” was made under the Land Husbandry Plan with economic and technical planning of a high order as its base.

For many reasons which are too close to us to assess properly, the Plan came to an end because a human barrier lay between technical knowledge and the soil, and there had been no increased per capita production.

My only reason for touching on the historical side is to show you we have tried—and tried out many different theories and methods—to increase African peasant production. My main purpose is to discuss with you the nature of this human barrier, this “socio-psychological barrier” as the Sadie Report calls it. Then perhaps we can really get to grips with this much publicised subject of “converting a subsistence economy into a cash economy”.

The Impact of an Agricultural Revolution.

May we first consider a few figures?

Not so long ago someone said, “If only we could induce the cultivator to raise his production to £170 it would mean an injection of £50 million into the economy each year”. Recently someone else pointed out that if African agricultural production could be doubled it would mean an injections of 7½ million to the national economy, and if it could be raised to the European standard, it would mean an additional £30 million.

Estimates of the average cash income of African cultivators seem to vary between 30/- and £5 per annum. Suppose it is £5. Then to double this at a 2% growth rate would take 35 years, and to reach £100 p.a. would take 116 years, with no population increase. Where in the world, in a subsistence peasant economy, has a growth rate of 2% been attained! And since the population is increasing at a rate of 3.5%, the prospect is an alarming one even before we get the time factor into perspective—35 years to double the per capita income!

This human barrier is not a multitude of individuals awaiting benefits to be demonstrated and each one capable of making his own decisions for his own private interests. To do this, to base plans on such an approach, is to build on a fiction.

Because it is possible, here and there, to convert or educate a unique individual, or even a group of them under your immediate care, and get remarkable results, it is unrealistic to base planning on the assumption that you can do the same for a whole society. Two entirely different operations are involved. In the one case you are pulling an individual out to train him. In the other you are trying to transplant a new technique into a society. We must not confuse the two operation. Naturally training of individuals is important and in the long term may have results but it can be exceedingly wasteful. For massive and sustained results it is the transplanting operation that requires priority of attention.

What we have to realise is that we are not dealing with just a collection of individuals, $2\frac{1}{2}$ million of them, but with a large number of organic wholes, each one of them different.

The Organic Whole.

It is this concept of, this focus on the idea of, an organic whole and the implications it has for economic growth and development planning that I am anxious to put over to you.

Perhaps I can illustrate the point by referring to the now famous heart transplant operation. We all read how, after the technical skills had transplanted the new heart into another body, a "process of rejection" set in, a mysterious reaction of the body to an invasion by a foreign organ. There was a call for research to be concentrated on this specialised medical field, for every evidence of "rejection" to be studied. "Tissue matching" and "incompatibility" became well-known terms and where the new sciences enabled these to be overcome it was still possible to say, "The technical problems are easy to solve but as regards the immunological question, we are dealing with something very fundamental to the body—its tendency to throw out something foreign".

How far can we go in drawing a parallel in the social field? A social body comprising individuals as cells, linked together by mental and emotional tissues forming customs and functional organs called institutions, all held together and supported by a skeleton or social structure to make up a complex whole. Into this social body we try to transplant the ideas and techniques which we Europeans consider to be good for them. How much understanding about this is there, how much research!

We are not dealing with any one individual's way of life, but with patterns of feeling, thinking and acting—built up over centuries as the result of the co-operation of many minds over many generations. These are the shared emotions and habits of a society, the invisible tissues holding it together, and underlying all its attitudes, customs and institutions.

Social Structure.

There seem to be seven elements of social structure bearing on our problem:—

- (i) Firstly, the individuals who come and go within it from one generation to another, and whose attitudes are moulded by it.
- (ii) Secondly, a system of ROLES: allocated throughout the structure but some individuals are selected, trained or prepared, as functionaries, to apply their minds to furthering the interests of the groups, guarding its ways, preserving its identity and territorial area;
- (iii) Thirdly, an assignment of STATUS: giving prestige and influence. Example, the elder and younger of brothers, father's sister, chief, old age.
- (iv) Fourth, an allocation of POWER: authority over the actions of others with appropriate rewards and punishments, power to make decision, to deal with frictions and decide what is good or bad behaviour. Example—who controls the grain bin or the cash crop of monkey nuts?
- (v) Fifth, a set of NORMS: prescribing the proper ways of behaving, the ideal personality (the gentleman, the chief, the nephew), the reasonable man of the law, the manner in which one OUGHT to act in any position, the daily judgments passed on everybody. Example—rules of land tenure
- (vi) Sixth, a set of BELIEFS: the explanations relied upon to explain things, their origin and support in myth, in the super-natural. It includes taboos and superstitions, the theories of causation in health (why an African gets a sty in the eye), in agriculture (what "divisi" can do, or the spirits) and whether Nature is something to control or helplessly placate. Beliefs about what Government should do, or what a community can do to help itself, are clearly important;
- (vii) Seventh, and permeating the whole set-up, a system of GOALS or objectives which people want — survival, subsistence, spiritual welfare, more wives or cattle and beer, education—the *collective targets* which induce *effort*.

Viewed in this way social structure is seen as an immense feature, a kind of framework within which decisions are made or actions occur. It places limits on an individual's range of choice. If he steps outside those limits, he is apt to feel the weight of social structure bear on him—the structural disapproval of those whose role it is to ensure conformity with norms; the gossip, ridicule, ostracism of his neighbours.

Is this not a process of rejection even more obscure and complex than that facing Dr. Barnard's team!

But before we get a distorted view of a kind of brick wall impervious to change, may we note that, unlike a static wall, social structure can also be viewed as a process of change because it ACTS and has to adapt. Thus there is not only a process of rejection in operation but also a process of acceptance, just as in the medical world foreign matter is taken in and converted into organic tissues. After all, maize spread throughout Africa without requiring agricultural extension to push it along! Every innovation has to go through a kind of competition for survival and this selection or rejection is as applicable to ideas and actions as it is to inventions or business projects. So it is that reformers in agriculture, health etc., who can see enormous benefits flowing from what is, for them, a simple change in habit, rarely appreciate that a whole complex of change is likely and that a social structure will reject, accept or modify the new element.

A material foreign body, like a plough may be accepted as it is but new ideas, skills and institutions can never be placed intact within a society: they have to be absorbed, digested and modified. But when a foreign body is accepted, the receiving society never knows what consequential changes will follow — for change follows change like ripples. Hence the paradox that “society resists change” and “society never ceases changing”. Our own Western civilization can be seen as a frantic effort to keep up with a runaway technology.

In trying to get this concept of an organic social whole accepted, and an understanding of the vital influence of social structure, it is noticeable that two extreme views have emerged. On the one side conclusions have been drawn which seize on certain features of resistance to change and exaggerate them. (That is why I have stressed that social structure is not a wall, that it is a process of change.)

For instance, it is claimed that:—

- (i) It is no good trying to change this impervious barrier, and so all the efforts made or being made to introduce new agricultural, health and local government practices, are a waste of effort and have been ineffective.
- (ii) The differences between African and European social structures are so enormous and unbridgeable that they must be kept separate and the traditional “tribal authority” must be preserved.
- (iii) Africans are so communally minded and bound up in their social structure that there is no scope for individual initiative and independent enterprise.
- (iv) The African social structures are in a state of mental and social stagnation and no changes are occurring. It is naive to suppose the tribal peasant can ever be made into an asset.

- (v) Those persons who occupy the top status and roles—in practice the chiefs and headmen—are so important that they must do the thinking and planning and everyone else will obey, so legislation should be directed towards bolstering them up and entrenching their authority over the whole structure and “alien” ideas like councils or voting should be rejected.

What these conclusions amount to are that no social transplants are desirable and that the old traditional structure is still there, it is effective despite new conditions, it is so valuable it must not be changed and in any case it is resistant to change. Note also that “Chieftainship”, which is an institution, is equated with the social structure. This is over-simplifying and in any case it is vital to ask—does such an institution promote or retard economic growth?

On the other hand there are those who brush aside structure and oppose such conclusions. They can produce equally valid evidence of great changes and so profitless argument follows. The educationist can point to enormous changes in the products of the school system. Women’s clubs, Girl Guides and similar bodies can point to transformation in the habits and outlook of African women. The Agriculturist can point to the rapid adoption of the plough, the success of the arable and grazing block system, the abandonment of the old system of sowing all crops together and ploughing up and down the hillside, winter ploughing, the use of manure and the manufacture of compost together with many recent practices such as the use of fertiliser and cattle fattening on an increasing scale.

It can be claimed that great progress has been achieved in productivity because the African population has not only been able to feed itself but has been able to put some £4 millions worth of produce on the market each year for about 15 years (why should this figure be so static?) Thus it is claimed that productivity must have been increasing at a rate at least equal to the $3\frac{1}{2}\%$ rate of population increase, so all that remains is to push on with the good work and achieve a “break through” by more investment in extension services and credit facilities, rather than claiming they have failed.

Breakthrough versus Break-up?

A “break through” implies a “break up”. How are these two divergent interpretations of the problem to be reconciled? The one trying to preserve the traditional structure: the other pushing on regardless. Is one correct, the other wrong?

Clearly the productivity of the so-called subsistence sector is deplorably meagre compared to its potential. It follows that the adoption of improved agricultural technology, even by a few, can lead to such an enormous increase

in productivity as to conceal the fact, that the mass of cultivators may not have changed at all, indeed are producing less and less as fertility declines, and some areas are importing food. Some research indicates that only about 2% of all cultivators are responsible for about a quarter of all the grain sales to the Grain Marketing Board. Even the figure mentioned of £4 million for African produce marketed conceals another fact, that over £2 millions of it comprise the annual sale of cattle from a tribal herd of 2,010,000 odd animals. Allowing an average value of £20 per head, this means £40,200,000 worth of cattle wandering about the tribal areas in a destructive capacity and the higher the price of cattle the less sold.

What do these figures, what do the individual success stories, what do the statistics collected by those whose purpose is improving agriculture, mean in terms of social structure, and changes in the mass of the tribesmen?

If you look for evidence of progressive agriculture you will easily find it. If you adopt a structural point of view, you will equally easily find evidence of resistance to change, on an alarming scale.

I suggest we take another and different look at social structure. A famous sociologist invited attention to a piano. He pointed out that the harder you struck a note, the louder the sound, and that an infinite variety of changes could be made with the notes. But if the force exerted exceeded a certain limit, the result is not an increase of sound, but a broken piano. What has happened? By its very nature, the piano allowed variations of sound up to a certain limit, beyond that you entered the zone of structure.

Could we say that societies also provide for a vast range of social changes, a toleration of variations and deviations up to a point, but beyond that there is a zone where social structure is encountered and comes into action!

We are all vaguely aware of this law. Those who design fashions or styles in motor cars know that if they go beyond certain limits, their styles will be rejected. You would call it a business flop. It offends, it is rejected, there is consumer resistance.

Nevertheless, if this eternal flux of change keeps within the permissible zone of variations, and changes little by little, it is astonishing how its cumulative build-up brings about enormous changes of attitudes, as anyone who compares standards and values today with those of say 30 years ago would agree. The result is, that as these countless attitudes change, the deeper structural zone and its institutions are infiltrated, and also change. What might have been previously rejected as alien, or a foreign body, becomes accepted—compatibility of tissues as the doctors might call it has set in: popularly we might say “the time is ripe”.

Can we not conclude that extension services devoted to bringing about desirable changes must obviously work through individuals—the “Master Farmers”, the entrepreneurs, the “new men”, the products of agricultural training institutions, the collaborators in the Stanning Scheme. But it is essential to realise that these are individual changes in the fringe zone, that they are “deviants” from the structural point of view and “pioneers” from the Extension point of view. As such their existence is precarious and full of social stresses. At any time they may give up, relapse, under the strain of the rejection process.

If this is so then such services as *Conex* or *African Farming Development* must see that there is a limit to their effectiveness as long as they stay in the individual zone of variations, say 3%, and that if massive, sustained economic growth is to be achieved, they must make structural and institutional changes their primary concern. They must conceive of their efforts as assistance to, and strengthening of institutional transplants, in which “compatibility” and “tissue matching” with the pre-existing social body of attitudes and values are vitally important.

Such new economic institutions as Co-operatives, which draw their strength from the economic advantages accruing to voluntary interest groups, offer firmer hopes of resistance to the rejection process. So also may the even newer Credit Unions.

Role of Community Development.

But the most powerful possibilities of all lie in the community development field, where the focus of development is on the social organism as a whole. To develop its capacity to think and feel and act, as a collective body, on a basis of communal organised self-help and self-control.

Obviously, if a community is to plan and act, it will only do so for goals and interests defined by itself, the things which the people want and will sacrifice their private interests for, will contribute their resources of labour, materials and cash, or acquiesce in such demands on them. They will not do this if an outsider decides what he considers they ought to do, what is good-for-them, or lays down his priorities.

Once a community does set out to do something, then clearly it must define its own goals, decide priorities, find planners, leaders, executives and tap new skills and resources. It becomes an enterprise with purpose of its own, and in doing so its social structure is drawn into action, and all the elements of that structure—new roles, new statuses, new powers, new norms and new beliefs, begin to exercise an influence.

The end result of any such movement, is a local government body, an African Council operating under legislation.

The social structure, of the various tribes, evolved in pre-literate, pre-money times, when there was ample space to shift about, and numbers to control were small. The change to modern conditions, is more an upheaval than a change, and makes a nonsense of such superficial theories as "development on their own lines", or "leave it to tribal law and custom".

Money in particular is a "foreign body", which is eating into the tissues, dissolving ancient ties between one person and another, dissolving institutions, disrupting marriage and inheritance norms, freeing people from traditional obligations, and opening doors to greed and corruption. Once money comes in, no institution, no authority, no chieftainship, will ever function again as it used to do. It has no defence against the power of money.

All the institutional devices we Europeans have devised, for the control of money, will have to be transplanted. From the women's clubs to the council, there is a need and a desire to learn, how to control money, and feel secure as to its care.

What answer to these deficiencies and gaps in the traditional social structure is there, except a dynamic support of community development and local government institutions, through adequate Government investment in training and financial grants and loans to African councils!

May we consider some of the significance for economic growth, of such an evolution in the social structure—

- (i) A new growth-promoting institution of local government is evolved, based on the organic tissues of the needs, wants and goals of the people. Does not this offer a chance of loosening the grip of a traditional subsistence mentality, and a hope for the national economy?
- (ii) Instead of the structure being a drag, or retarding influence on economic growth, it is prompted to diversify its operations through institutional growth. Growth of any kind means increase in size, complexity, in specialised organization, be it in a tree or a social structure. Economic growth cannot take place in isolation, it requires an institutional base, a support, a communal incentive to action, and this I suggest means the accommodation, within the structure, of a transplant—a local government council. You will recall that the Whaley Constitutional Commission³, stated that the institution of chieftainship depends on the willingness of Chiefs to adapt themselves to a cash economy and local government institutions.

3 Report of the Constitutional Commission 1968—Para. 620.

- (iii) The early stages of any development are always a period of tension and disruption of traditional ways and institutions. Instead of resigned acceptance, of what the Sadie Report called "Individualism as the price to be paid for progress"—the end result being an uprooted, demoralised and insecure mob or rabble—we aim at conserving community coherence, pride and capacity to act together.
- (iv) Instead of the "progressive farmer" or productive and enterprising individual being a deviant, an object of suspicion and rejected because he goes against the norms and beliefs, the structure is itself changed and such individuals become valued members supported by the structure simply to meet its own chosen commitments. This of course implies that the council school, clinic or other services will close down if the people fail to play their part, or that sanctions will be applied to those who try to escape their obligations.
- (v) Instead of the extension services wasting a substantial part of their efforts in trying to persuade people to listen to them, and at best gaining a few adherents in the fringe zone, those same services may be hard pressed to meet the demand generated by mass motivation through the structure. Agricultural production is always a means to an end, not an end in itself. There is scant appreciation of this in the claim that, "the best investment is bringing new knowledge to peasant farmers". The energy put into agriculture, the desire to improve technology, depends on non-agricultural goals set by the people themselves.
- (vi) Sir Arthur Lewis pointed out that in all societies wealth, prestige and power are very closely associated but much depends on what the wealthy do with their wealth. Is it put into productive investment? A subsistence mentality simply does not know what to do with money. A realistic chief said, "Money is like dew, it vanishes in the morning". Either incentive to earn money lapses as soon as a personal and temporary target is achieved or the money goes into consumption, and since traditional standards bestow status, prestige, power and familiar satisfaction, new income tends to go into traditional patterns, not economic growth or more productivity. Hence more beer, more cattle, additional wives and, under modern influences, better clothes, or fine houses and any utensils which reduce effort or novelties which add prestige. It is not enough to praise "more money in your pockets" as an objective. It will be good for trade, for trade syphons off what little money there is, back to the market sector. However, it leaves the subsistence economy worse off than before. How much better is it, that a council takes off wealth in the form of rates, for productive invest-

ment in the tribal areas, and continues to do so year after year to maintain its services?

Conclusions.

In this paper I have been somewhat exclusively concerned to bring out the importance of the neglected features of the problem. This is not to imply that the promotion of co-operative activity, credit unions, family planning and particularly what has been called "intermediate technology" in the tribal areas is not vital, also industrial and commercial expansion in the European economy to rid the tribal areas of the insupportable burden of excessive population.

There is no room for exclusiveness in tackling this enormous problem of economic growth. We have never believed in this country that community development, by itself, provides an adequate approach. Left to itself a community is likely to remain in a state of stagnation, in retrogression as population numbers increase and fertility of the soil declines. For us community development and primary development go hand in hand.

Primary Development—which might be more clearly called Infrastructure or Environmental Development—is aimed directly at changing the environment in which communities live, at creating a habitat conducive to economic growth. A community is always fused into its natural habitat (human ecology if you like) and if that be changed the people, their social structure and their institutions have got to adapt to the new habitat, whether they like it or not.

So Primary Development, as a vigorous plan of Government, should provide the essential roads and bridges, the basic artificial water supplies, the irrigation schemes, the marketing facilities, in a word the infrastructure, or the "take-off base" which are the indispensable prerequisites for any economic growth. Would you agree that a new road brings about more changes than 100 teachers?

May I stress "prerequisites" as distinct from "causes". Failure to recognise the distinction in planning so easily leads to the idea that "sound investment" is that devoted to spectacular, measurable material, construction projects or to disproportionate weight of finance to the so-called productive extensions services. Of course both are necessary but not at the expense of community development or by relegating it to the sidelines, for the "causes" of economic growth—sustained, substantial, internally generated growth (what the Sadie Report calls "an endogenous process")—lie in the community development field, not in that of primary development.

Ministry of Internal Affairs.
Salisbury.

OUTLINE OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE TO AFRICAN COUNCILS.

BLOCK GRANTS.

16/- in the £ of rates collected.

SALARY GRANTS.

Up to 60% of salary of a qualified and approved secretary and/or treasurer.

SPECIFIC GRANTS.

Normally 50% of approved expenditure incurred in Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Forestry, Water Supplies and Road.

AD HOC GRANTS.

Initial grants to help a new council get started and to assist in unforeseeable circumstances.

EDUCATION GRANTS. (From Ministry of African Education).

The same grant system as that extended to Mission primary schools applies when a council establishes a school, namely teachers' salaries and managerial visiting grants.

HEALTH GRANTS. (From the Ministry of Health).

The accent is on preventive health, as certain drugs are supplied free from Medical Stores, other drugs at 25% cost and salary grants of 50% of approved health workers. Subject to special approval grants in aid of half the costs of clinic buildings, furniture and equipment.

LOANS.

New councils may be granted initial loan funds to meet cost of building office, store and safe premises and secretary's house.

Approved councils may draw on loan funds for the erection of administrative and school premises.

MISCELLANEOUS.

Government funds are set aside for Community Development Training, Domboshawa Training Centre being a notable example of this where councilors, council staff and many leaders (men and women) are trained.
July, 1968.



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